

What is Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo? (BPPV)

What is BPPV?

BPPV is the most common type of inner ear balance disorder. BPPV is an abbreviation that means:

Benign: not life threatening

Paroxysmal: sudden increase of symptoms

Positional: symptoms occur in certain head positions

Vertigo: a spinning sensation

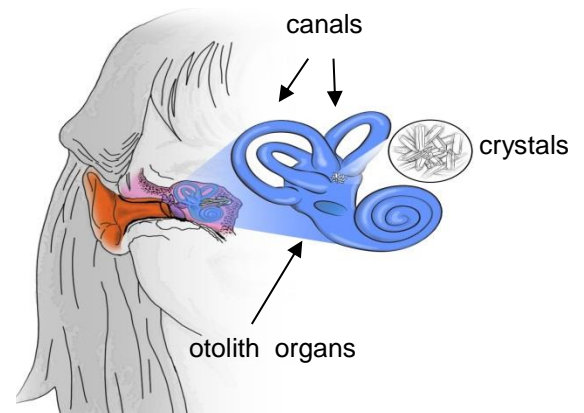
What are symptoms of BPPV?

The main symptom of BPPV is brief vertigo (spinning) that occurs in certain head positions. The vertigo lasts a few seconds to a couple of minutes. If your vertigo is severe enough, you may also experience nausea, vomiting, or imbalance. Head positions that often trigger BPPV symptoms include looking up and rolling over in bed.

What Causes BPPV?

For most people with BPPV, the cause is unknown; however, BPPV can occur from head trauma or other inner ear balance disorders. BPPV is more common in people over the age of 50 years than in younger people but it can occur at any age.

The inner ear balance system has two types of balance organs: canals and otolith organs. The canals sense head rotation and the otoliths organs sense head position. Tiny crystals (see inset to right) located in the otolith organs aid in the ability to sense changes in head position. In a healthy ear, these crystals are held securely in place. In people with BPPV, the crystals detach from the otolith organs and enter the canals. When the crystals move through the canals, sensory cells in the canals send a signal to the brain and the eyes that the head is rotating or spinning.



How is BPPV diagnosed?

BPPV is diagnosed with a quick positioning test. During the test, a clinician will use video goggles to watch your eyes. You will be positioned on your back with your head extended over the edge of a bed or table. The clinician will observe your eye movements during the test to determine if you have BPPV.

How is BPPV treated?

BPPV can be easily treated with a procedure called *canalith repositioning*. You will be placed in a series of head positions while lying on a table or bed (see illustration). The procedure moves the crystals through the canals of the inner ear. The clinician will observe your eye movements with video goggles during the treatment. You may briefly experience vertigo during the procedure. The procedure takes about five minutes to perform. You will be scheduled for a follow-up visit in one to two weeks after your BPPV treatment.

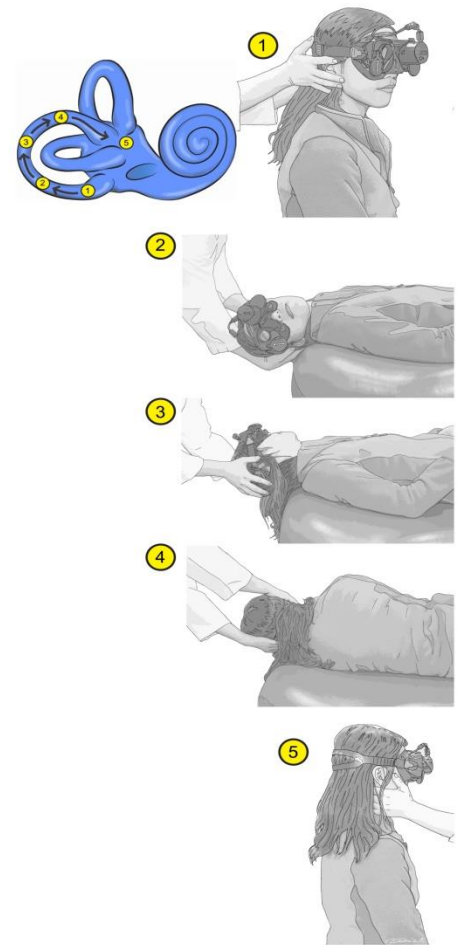
How effective is the treatment for BPPV?

Vertigo (spinning) is resolved in most people after one treatment. Some people will need a second treatment at the follow-up visit. After the treatment, BPPV does not recur in most people. However, in some people, the vertigo may return, and a repeat treatment is needed.

What should I do if I think I have BPPV?

If you are a veteran in the Mountain Home area, call 423-926-1171 ext. 7500.

If you are a non-veteran or a veteran outside of Mountain Home, contact your physician or health care provider.



The *canalith repositioning* procedure is commonly used to treat BPPV in the clinic.



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Mountain Home VA Medical Center